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(54) Abstract Title

Tournament play gaming machine

(57) A gaming apparatus comprises a number of linked reel type gaining machines 5 wherein each gaming machine can be played independently or as part of a multi-user "tournament" style participation game. Play is transferred to the participation game by fulfilment of certain criteria during the independent game. A secondary display 2 to show the participation game is provided and may be in the form of an overlayed or separate screen on the machine or on a separate large display screen. The participation game may be in the form of a "skill stop" game, "wheel of fortune" game or "bingo" style game.

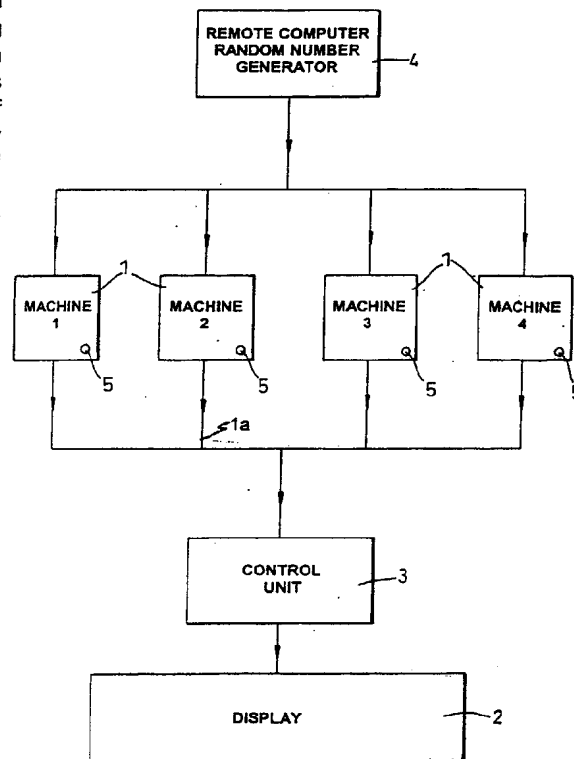


Fig. 1

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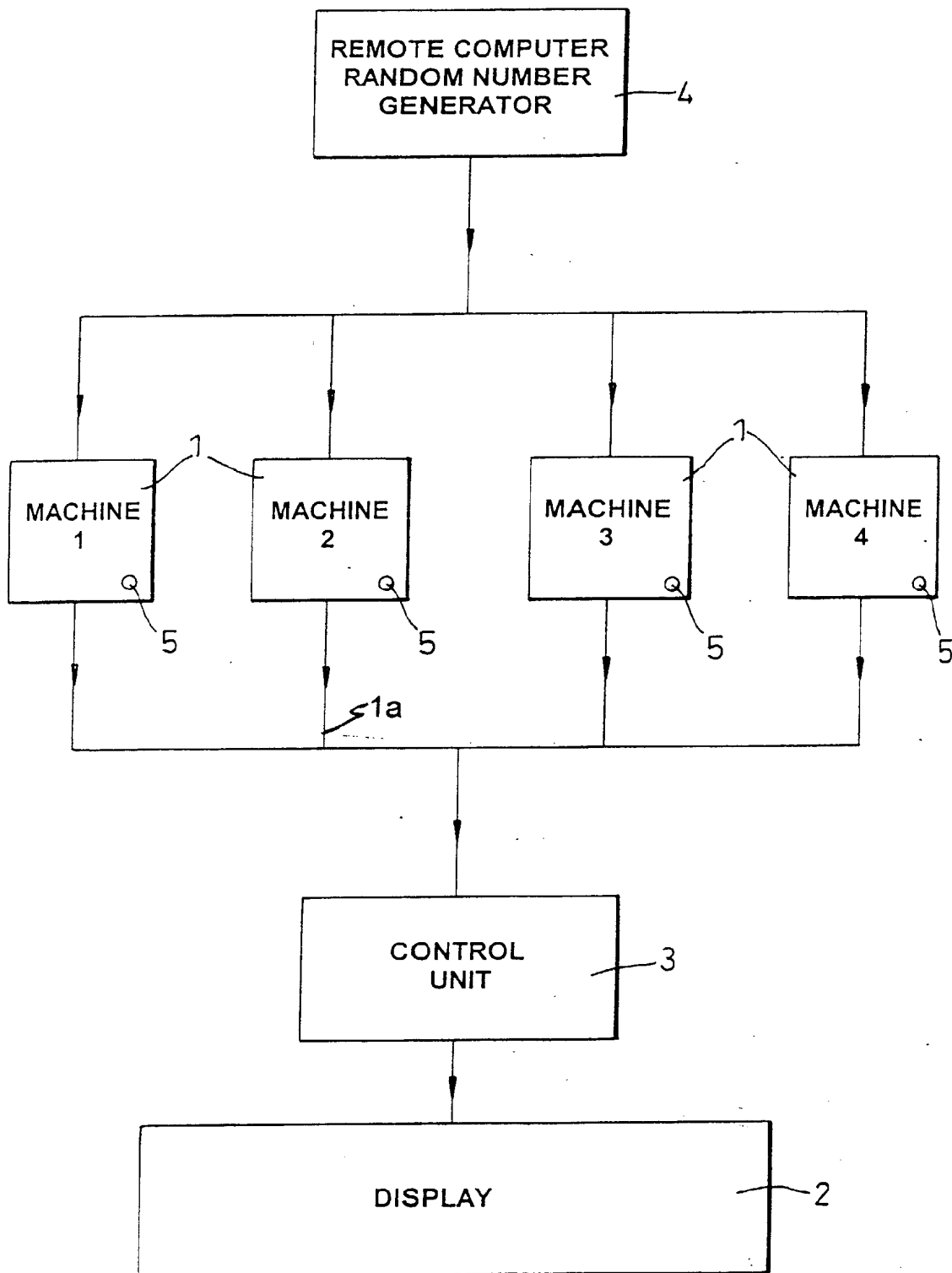


Fig. 1

| | | | |
|------------|------|------------|------------|
| \$100 | \$20 | \$5 | ELIMINATED |
| ELIMINATED | \$50 | \$10 | \$20 |
| \$5 | \$25 | ELIMINATED | \$10 |
| ELIMINATED | \$75 | \$5 | \$10 |

Fig. 2

2a

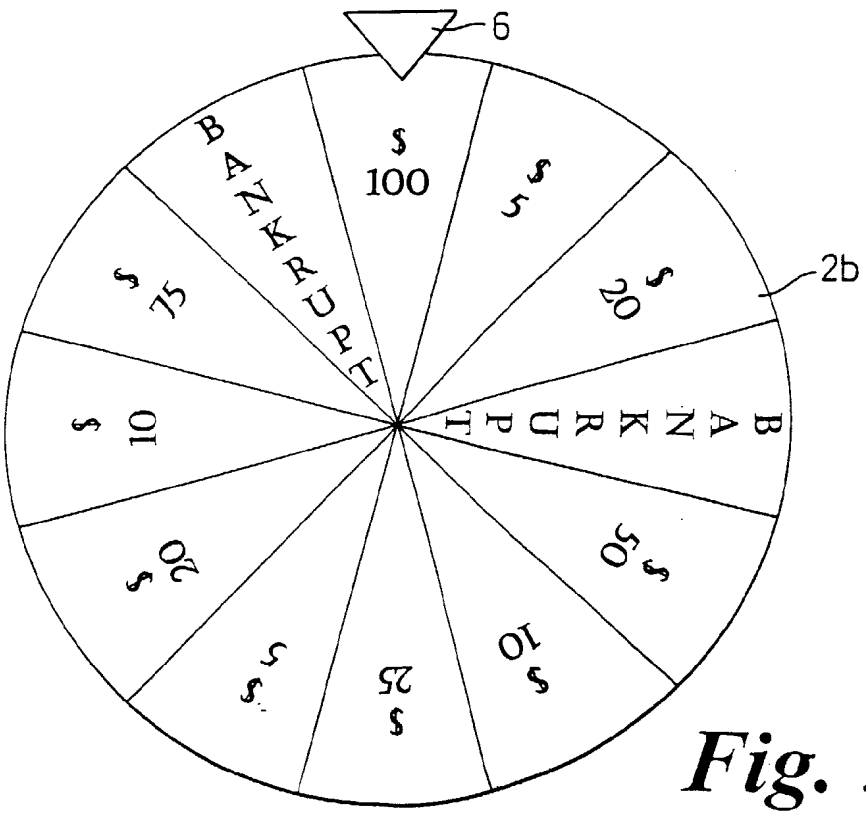


Fig. 3

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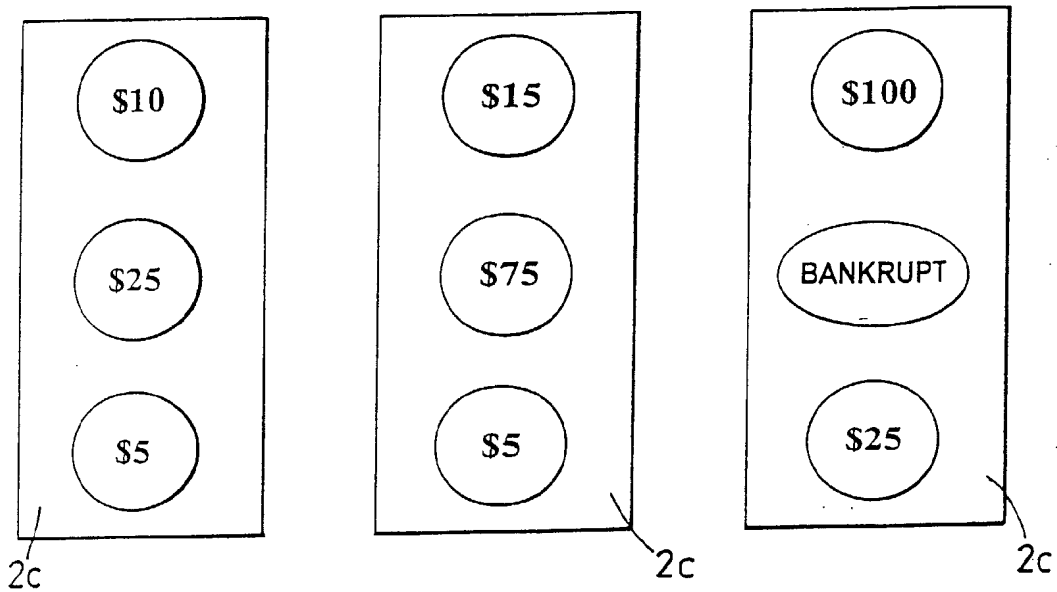


Fig. 4

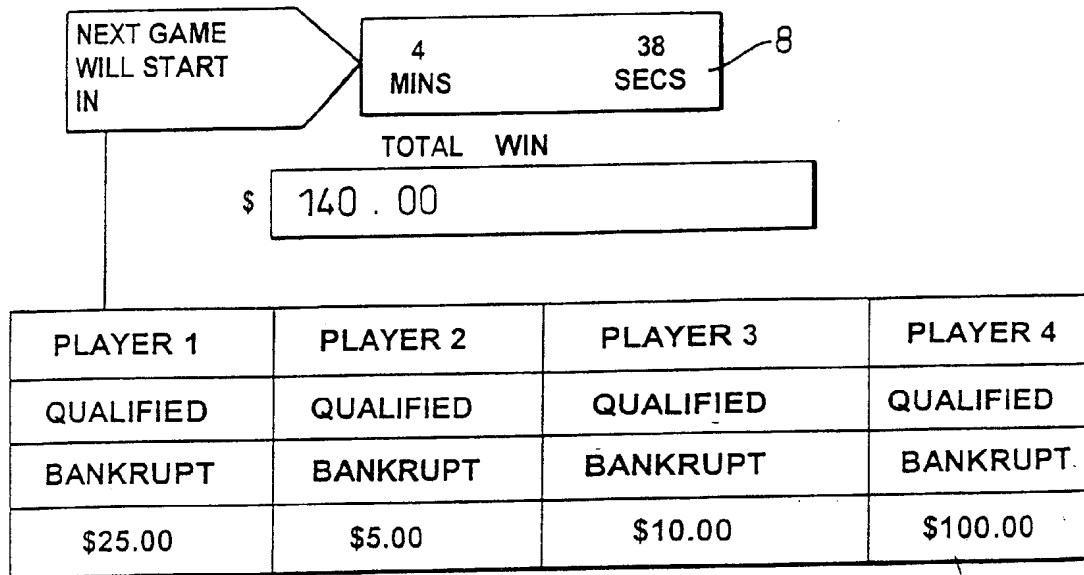


Fig. 5

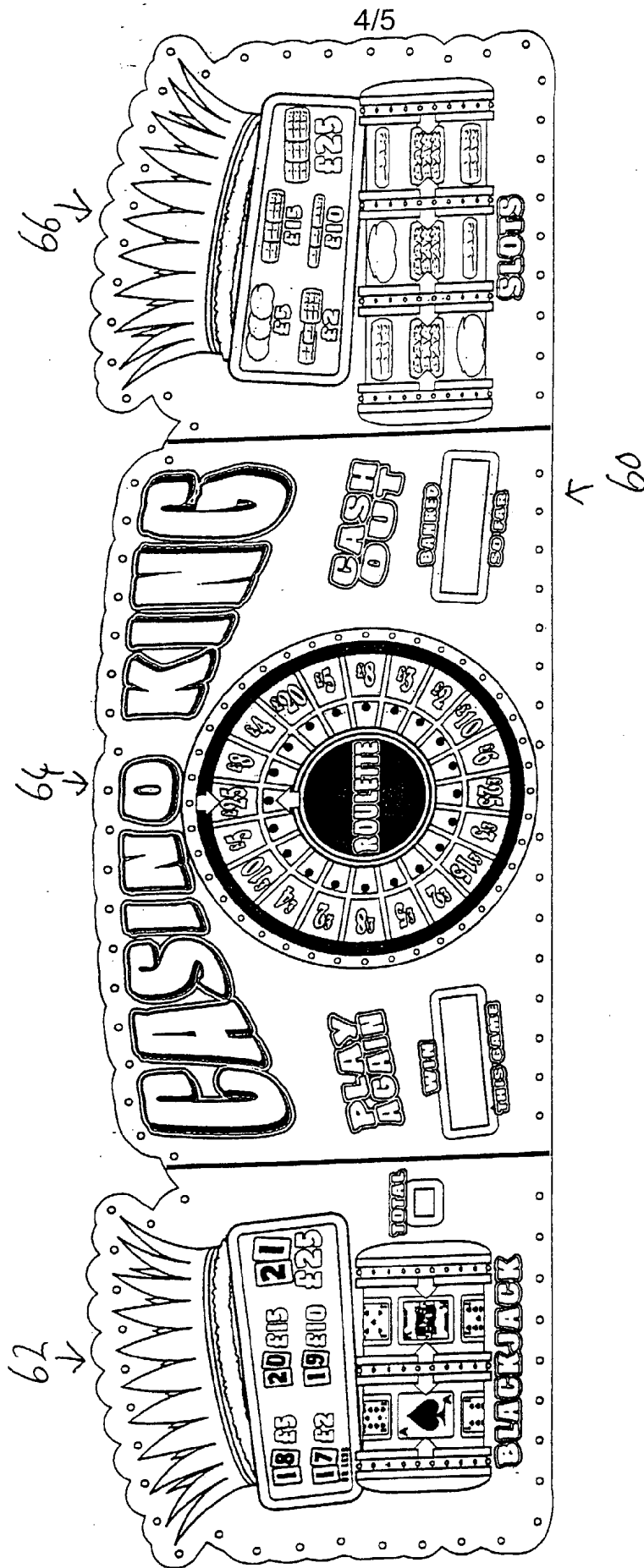


Fig. 6

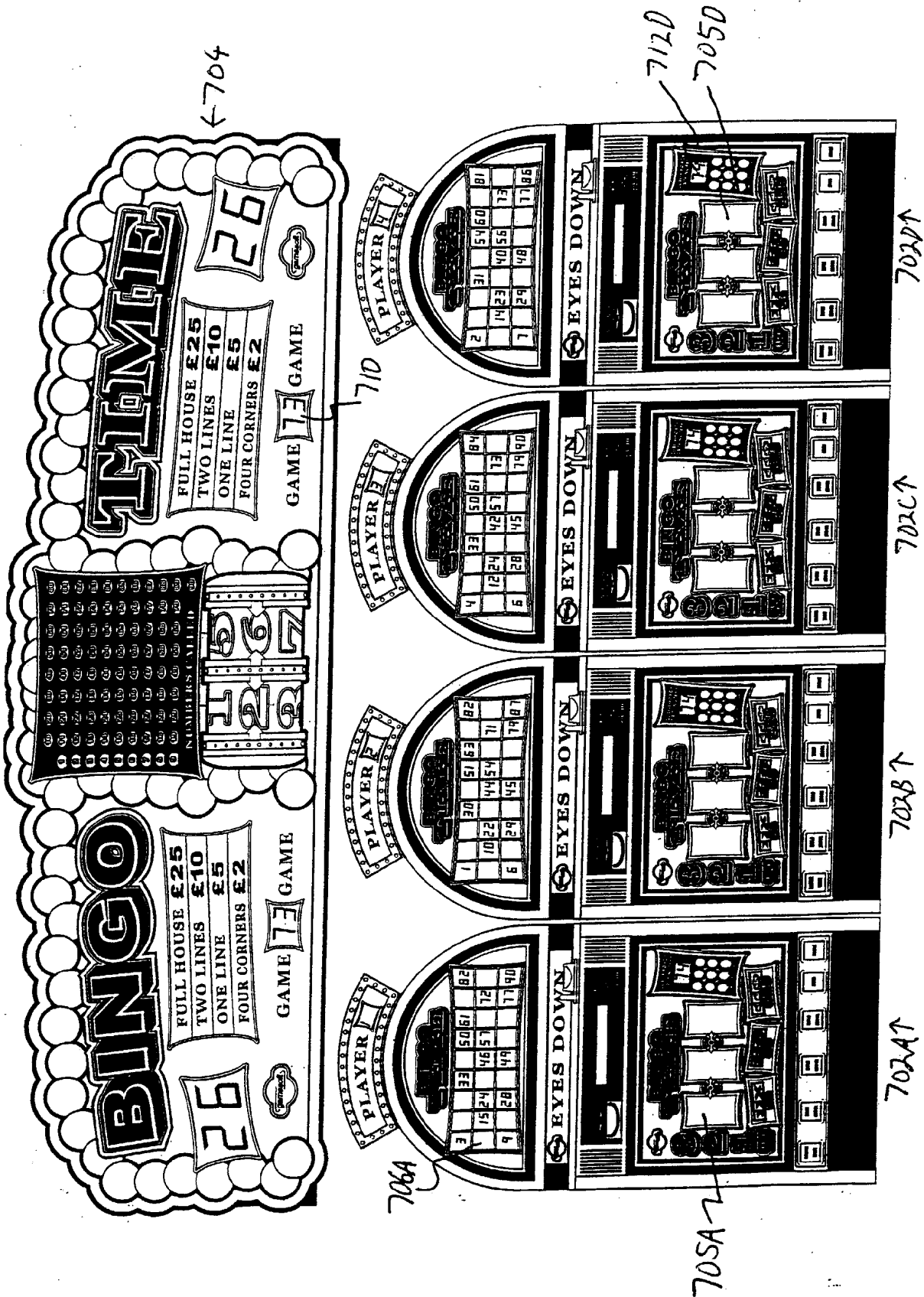


Fig. 7

GAMING APPARATUS

This invention relates to gaming apparatus, and is concerned with a group of gaming machines linked together so that, while certain events may generate prizes awarded at the machine in question, a rare event will generate an opportunity to win an exceptional prize signalled at a common unit to which the machines are linked.

In US 6068553, gaming apparatus is described where individual machines are linked to a display and a special win on one of the machines results in a prize from the display being randomly selected and awarded to the player of that machine. If a particular zone of the display lights up randomly after a special win, a definite specified prize will be awarded. If more than one of the machines produces a special win at around the same time then a queuing system can be utilised to award the players of the machines in order, one at a time.

According to one aspect of the present invention there is provided gaming apparatus comprising:

a plurality of individually playable gaming machines, the machines being playable in self-contained and participation modes, the self-contained mode being with each machine being played independently for its own prizes, and the participation mode allowing players of said machines selected for participation (qualified players) to be awarded a prize distinct from any prize available from any said machine in self-contained mode;

a common control unit;

a link allowing communication between said machines and said unit, and

a participation mode display for displaying play of the apparatus during participation mode.

5 In some embodiments of this invention the players can have some influence, or apparent influence, on the value and/or distribution of prize(s) the display delivers during the prize selection process on the display. In other
embodiments, qualified players can be awarded prizes automatically without necessarily participating in the actual selection of prizes, e.g. a predetermined prize is awarded to all the qualified players by the common control unit substantially simultaneously, with the prizes being shown on the participation
10 mode display. This should increase the interest and satisfaction in playing the apparatus. The game played in the participation mode may sometimes be referred to as a "tournament" in the gaming field.

The participation mode display may be a display distinct from displays associated with the individual machines, e.g. it can be a separate monitor or
15 screen located where it can be seen by players of several or all of the machines. Alternatively or additionally, one or more display associated with one or more respective said machine may be used as the participation mode display. In one embodiment, only part of a said display associated with a said machine is used for displaying the participation mode display, e.g. the area of the display is split
20 to show features associated with the self-contained mode and features associated with the participation mode. Alternatively, the participation mode features may at least partially obscure the self-contained mode features on the display during participation mode.

In certain embodiments, at least some of the machines and/or the common control unit include personal computers that are connected to a communications network (e.g. a local area network or the Internet). In these cases, the link is a network link allowing data transfer between the individual machines/unit.

Participation may be initiated on a random basis, those qualifying being selected arbitrarily, and the activation of the participation controls following no particular event. Participation can be initiated on a time-related basis, e.g. on every hour or half-hour, or at specific time(s) of day. Participation may be initiated by any one machine delivering a particular qualifying win. Furthermore participation may only be permitted to those machines that have been played within a pre-determined period prior to the particular qualifying win of said one machine or whose last play has been with a maximum stake or with a side wager.

It will generally be required that for participation players of other machines have to achieve a qualifying win on their machines within a given period following the particular qualifying win on said one machine. Any player achieving a further qualifying win on his machine within said given period may receive a bonus such as the banking of a further qualification to be used subsequent to the competition or the increase of any prize won during the competition or the facility to cancel an adverse selection from the display.

If there are two or more qualifying players then they are both party to the participation mode, but take part in the participation mode game in turn. For example, after a certain number of players have qualified, the first player to

qualify participates in the participation mode first, then the second player to qualify, and so on. Alternatively, the order in which the qualified players take part in the participation mode may be selected randomly, or may be dependent upon the prizes that they are awarded during the participation mode. Some or all
5 of the qualified players may take part in the participation mode more than once.

Alternatively, if two or more of the machines produce special wins simultaneously, the prize selecting/awarding process may be carried out substantially simultaneously for the corresponding number of players.

In one form the prizes are indicated on a static display and are
10 sequentially highlighted in the participation mode, the final prize highlighted being awarded. Generally participation controls on their machines will enable qualified players to attempt to arrest the highlighting at a desired prize, although the prize control unit may be capable of imparting imperceptible delay to the control signals to ensure a prize within the capacity of the apparatus to deliver.

15 An alternative is for the prizes to be shown on a wheel of fortune which is rotated in the participation mode, the prize indicated when the wheel stops being awarded. Again participation controls on their machines will usually enable qualified players to attempt to arrest the wheel with a desired prize indicated.

20 A further possibility is for the prizes to be shown on reels which are rotated in the participation mode, the prizes indicated on a win line when the reels stop being awarded. And yet again participation controls on their machines will generally enable qualified players to attempt to stop the reels with desired prizes indicated, although with several reels stoppable separately a player has more chance to exercise some skill.

The prize distribution may be equal amongst the qualified players, irrespective of what individual players have won from the display. Alternatively, the prize distribution will be weighted, and this may be according to the order in which qualified players have contributed most to the total prize.

5 Alternatively the prize distribution to the qualified players could be random or it could be determined by having the participation in stages, the lowest contributor in the first stage being eliminated and so on until the highest contributor at the final stage wins. That could be modified so that the total prize has weighted distribution according to the reverse order of elimination, the
10 player not being eliminated receiving the greatest share.

Another possibility is for the prize distribution to be determined by qualified players again playing their respective machines, the prizes being determined by the relative results on the machines.

A non-qualified player can qualify for and participate in a participation
15 mode game that is currently being played by qualified players. Alternatively, a non-qualified player can qualify for and participate in a subsequent participation mode game that commences after a participation mode game being played by qualified players has been completed.

In some embodiments, data stored on the common control unit is used to
20 determine the prizes available to a player during the participation mode; however, in other embodiments, data relating to the prizes available in the participation mode for a player of each said individual machine is stored on the respective individual machine. Thus, the apparatus can give a player of a machine the impression that the participation mode prizes are somehow linked

with or dependent upon the other machines, whilst in fact it is only the individual machine that awards the prize. This can also allow the apparatus to fall within regulations that control the amounts of prizes awarded by gaming machines.

5 Obviously, a competition must be limited: players cannot be allowed to carry on winning prizes indefinitely. However, there is an attraction in having, instead of or in addition to a set limit by time or number of permissible control operations, an indefinite sequence of chances to win or add to a prize, which is bound to be terminated sooner but more hopefully later.

10 Therefore the display may include prize signs and at least one deciding win sign, prizes accumulating while prize signs are selected, but each selection of a deciding win sign terminating the associated machine's participation, the player of that machine winning the prize(s) he has accumulated from the display.

15 Alternatively the display may include prize signs and at least one deciding win sign, participation entailing cyclic operation of participation controls on their machines by the qualified players which cause prizes to accumulate while prize signs are selected, until one participation control causes the deciding win sign to be selected, whereupon the player of the associated machine wins the accumulated prizes.

20 Another possibility is for the display to include prize signs and at least one disqualification sign, participation entailing cyclic operation of participation controls on their machines by the qualified players which causes prizes to accumulate while prize signs are selected, but which results in the elimination of any player whose participation control selects a disqualification sign, this

continuing until a final disqualification leaves one player still qualified who wins the total prizes accumulated.

Where appropriate, to keep players continuously occupied the display may be adapted to be duplicated for each qualified player beyond the first one so that the players can operate participation controls on their machines simultaneously.

According to another aspect of the present invention there is provided gaming apparatus including:

a plurality of individually playable gaming machines, the machines being playable in self-contained and participation modes, the self-contained mode being with each machine being played independently for its own prizes, and the participation mode allowing players of said machines selected for participation (qualified players) to be awarded a prize distinct from any prize available from any said machine in self-contained mode;

a common control unit;
a link allowing communication between said machines and said unit, and
a participation mode game selection component for allowing all or some of the qualified players to select a game to play during the participation mode.

The participation mode game selection component may be used by the player once or more, e.g. when he first qualifies, or every time he qualifies. More than one player may be allowed to select the same participation mode game, or only one player may play each game at a time. The participation mode games can include roulette, slot, dice or card types of games.

According to further aspects of the invention there are provided methods of playing games substantially as described above.

For a better understanding of the invention some embodiments will now be described, by way of example, with reference to the accompanying drawings,
5 in which:

Figure 1 is a schematic diagram of gaming apparatus,

Figure 2 illustrates one form of display usable with such apparatus,

Figure 3 illustrates another form of display,

Figure 4 illustrates a third form of display,

10 Figure 5 shows an indicator panel associated with any of those displays,

Figure 6 illustrates a further example of a display, and

Figure 7 illustrates a yet another example of a display.

The apparatus has four gaming machines 1 (there may be more or less) linked via a link 1a to a display 2 through a control unit 3. In the embodiment of
15 Figure 1, the link 1a can be one or more cables that allow communication between the various components. For some embodiments a remote computer or random number generator 4 has an input to each machine 1 to determine which of those machines may participate in trying to gain prizes shown on the display.

20 The gaming machines 1 are grouped so that the players can see the displays. The gaming machines may typically be those known as slot machines or fruit machines, with three or four reels that spin and stop with symbols showing in a line across respective windows on each of the machines. The reels may be electronically simulated rather than being actual mechanical reels.

Certain combinations may result in prizes being awarded, but in some embodiments at least one particular combination will be classed as a special win and gain the player access to the display 2 through the control unit 3 for playing in a participation mode. Alternatively, access to the display may be gained by the computer 4 randomly, or at least apparently randomly, generating an access signal, which is recognised and acted upon only when at least one of the machines is played. So whatever combination happens to be turned up by that one machine can be regarded as a special win at that time.

Each machine 1 will also have at least one control button 5 which the player uses when he does have access to the display 2. This may be a separate button not used when the gaming machine is being played in the ordinary fashion, or it could be one of the control buttons, such as a "Hold" button, that has a dual function and which can be operated to hold a reel when the machine is being played on its own (the self-contained mode) or to influence the display when the player has achieved a special win (the participation mode). With more than one control button more complex play can be introduced, demanding decision-making and strategy on the part of the player.

In another embodiment of the apparatus, at least some of the gaming machines 1 are constituted by personal computers executing gaming software that are linked to the other components, typically over the Internet or a Local Area Network. Another computer/server linked to the network can act as the control unit 3 (and random number generator 4). Input/output devices, e.g. a keyboard, joystick, touch-screen or mouse, attached to the computers can function as the control button 5.

But generally, the nature of the gaming machines 1 is not critical, although all those in a group should be similar to give players an equal chance of special wins.

5 The display 2 may also take any of several different forms. In one example, typically where the apparatus is located in a gaming hall or casino, the display can be a large screen (e.g. based on plasma, LCD, CRT, or any other suitable technology) located where it is visible to the players of the machines. Alternatively, several such screens may act as the display where it is not practical for all the players to view a single display, the image on each screen
10 being substantially identical, or specially adapted for its intended viewers (e.g. if there are two screens, one intended for first and second machine players and the other screen for third and fourth players then features relating to the intended viewers may be more prominent on the appropriate display). In other cases, e.g. where the apparatus comprises computers connected over a
15 network, the display 2 may appear on monitors connected to the computers, with the participation mode features appearing in another window or area of the screen. The display may include computer-generated graphics, or it could show a remote view of a physical gaming apparatus, e.g. a wheel of fortune, via a camera. Alternatively or additionally, the display may be implemented by means
20 of mechanical or electro-mechanical elements.

Three examples of the types of games playable using the display 2 are shown in Figures 2, 3 and 4, the display of Figure 2 being a panel 2a with a matrix mostly of monetary prizes but with a few zones marked ELIMINATED. These zones are individually illuminated in rapid sequence (not necessarily in

order along rows or columns) and the aim of the player with an active control button 5 is to stop the illumination at a desired zone. If his timing is right, the amount in that zone is set aside to contribute to the eventual total prize. The randomness may be more apparent than real and the control unit 3 may be
5 programmed to make the display give the impression of skill.

Keeping the button 5 pressed down will not work: it has to be released after every activation before it can secure any further contributions. Subject to early elimination, each player may be given a set time, or a certain number of button operations, and then the next machine is used and so on through the
10 players, each having just one button press at a time. Alternatively, a screen capable of splitting the original display into two, three or more duplicate displays could provide for simultaneous operation.

One zone may make more than one contribution during a competition, or it could be arranged that once it has contributed it is no longer available. Of
15 course that means that the later players will have less available targets. If ELIMINATED is selected, that terminates that player's participation, although prizes gained up to that point will not be lost.

The display of Figure 3 is a wheel of fortune 2b which spins past a fixed arrow 6, the aim of the player with an active control button being to stop the
20 wheel with the arrow opposite a sector with a prize indicated rather than the BANKRUPT legend. If BANKRUPT is selected, prizes gained up to that point will be lost, either entirely, or at least to the player concerned, when they will go into a pool to be distributed to other players. To give the players some protection they could each have an ESCAPE button to terminate their turn on

the display early. Having won substantial prizes, they might want to get out before being made bankrupt at the last spin of the wheel, for example.

5 The display of Figure 4 is similar to that of a slot or fruit machine, the bands of the reels 2c having a sequence of prizes with the occasional BANKRUPT legend. In competition mode these reels spin and the player with the active control button 5 may either have just one opportunity to stop the reels (which they will preferably do in sequence as is conventional with fruit machines) or he may have to press the control button three times to stop the reels in sequence, say right to left. Again, the aim would be to stop each reel with a prize showing rather than BANKRUPT.

10 The activation of these displays may be automatic once the competition mode is entered, and each player operates his button only to stop the movement. Alternatively, it may be required of the player to start the movement by pressing his button once and then stopping it by a second press, or by operating two different buttons, one for START, the other for STOP. A third alternative is for the player just to start the movement by pressing his button, the stopping of the movement being governed in an at least apparently random manner by the control unit.

15 Where ELIMINATED or BANKRUPT appear on the display there could instead be a legend such as PAY or WIN, for variations to be described below.

20 In addition to the display of Figure 2, 3 or 4, there will also be an indicator panel 7 for the participation mode, such as that shown in Figure 5. This shows which player has qualified and has an active control button, what he has won, whether he has been eliminated or made bankrupt, and the total of prizes

achieved. There is also a clock 8 which can have more than one function, as described below.

There are various triggers that can be employed to start a participation session as mentioned above. It may simply be a randomly generated signal so that all those machines linked to the display, or randomly selected ones, or only those which have been active within a recent period, are available to participate. An alternative to this is to demand a minimum stake or a side bet or separate wager for qualification.

An added restriction on entry to the participation could be that not only must the machine have been played within a recent period, say five seconds, but that the maximum stake must have been wagered. So only active and relatively 'high rolling' players will be admitted. In yet another embodiment a (time) counter indicator may be provided for each player, the counter decrementing if the machine is not played at a certain rate betting the maximum stake. When the participation mode is triggered (e.g. randomly) then all the players who have a minimum level on their counter indicators can qualify.

Yet another way of deciding who can participate is to use an initial qualification of one machine as a starting point. For example, as soon as the player of that machine achieves a particular win that qualifies him to participate in use of the display, that is signalled visually and/or audibly to the other players who then have a set period, say five minutes, in which to achieve a similar particular win and thus qualify as well. This will encourage fast and furious play as the others attempt to join the first player in the participation. One function of the clock 8 is to show how much time is left of this qualifying period.

Meanwhile the first player has five minutes on his hands, and he could simply stand by his machine waiting for the participation mode to start. Although very unlikely, he could even walk away from it and surrender the opportunity for a substantial prize to someone else. But to keep him playing it can be arranged that, should he come up with another qualifying win before the participation mode starts, that second qualification can be "banked" and used to initiate another participation mode after the first one has been completed. If one or more players qualify whilst a participation mode game is being played by another player then the one or more players may qualify whilst this is in progress and play the next participation mode game together. Participation mode game indicators (e.g. numbers) may be displayed on individual machines and/or the main display to help avoid confusion between the current participation mode game being played and the one for which the player is attempting to qualify. Or where elimination or bankruptcy is a possibility, the second qualification could enable that directive to be cancelled (should it appear during the participation mode) and allow the player to carry on trying to increase his winnings. Alternatively, such a second qualifying win could be made to augment any winnings from the display, for example it could cause any win by the player concerned to be doubled, or even trebled if a third qualifying win was achieved within the five minutes.

This also applies to other players qualifying within the set period, which they may do early on, leaving them time to play more in the self-contained mode.

With a single display, each machine must be played in turn, and the currently available one may be identified by, for example, a tower light on that machine illuminating. It will also be identified on the indicator panel 7 of Figure 5 by the light behind PLAYER 1, 2, 3 or 4, flashing, for example.

5 Once each player has completed his turn, it must be determined how the total prize is distributed on the display, and now the wheel of fortune embodiment of Figure 3 will be used to explain various alternatives.

EXAMPLE 1

10 In a "winner takes all" competition, without any time limit, each player in turn spins the wheel, and any prize indicated is credited to him. If he is unlucky and the wheel stops at BANKRUPT, he is out, but the prizes he has won stay in the pool. This continues until all but one player has gone bankrupt, and that player "scoops the pool".

EXAMPLE 2

15 BANKRUPT is replaced by PAY, and the first player whose wheel spin results in PAY being selected is awarded the total prize, eliminating all the other players at a stroke.

EXAMPLE 3

20 Again with PAY rather than BANKRUPT, each player wins what he has accumulated up to the point of PAY being selected. He then drops out and the next player continues until he hits PAY and so on.

EXAMPLE 4

Yet again with PAY rather than BANKRUPT, once everyone has finished in the competition mode, the total is equally divided between all the qualified

players. Each player will try to maximise the total for the common good, and the competition is between the player and the display.

EXAMPLE 5

5 As Example 4 but with BANKRUPT and a limit of time or number of wheel spins for each player. Any player who does hit BANKRUPT before his turn ends has his prizes forfeit and has to retire. He may then either have no prize at all or he may still share in the collective prize accumulated by others when they have completed their turns.

EXAMPLE 6

10 As Example 4 or 5 but the total is divided unequally, in a weighted manner. With PAY on the wheel, for example, the player who lasted the longest is awarded a major share (which might well not be equal to what he had himself accumulated), the player who was the previous one to be stopped would receive a lower share, and so on, with perhaps the first player to be stopped receiving
15 nothing. A typical distribution in percentages might be 60: 30: 10 for the top three players.

EXAMPLE 7

20 Similar to Example 6 but the prizes are paid in random proportions from the total to the qualified players. The tower lights of the machines could be made to flash in sequence until eventually one remains lit, indicating that the player on that machine wins the total prize or the highest percentage. In the latter case, further flashing sequences determine who gets second and third prizes. Another possibility is a rotating wheel or drum whose position when stopped after a spin determines which participating machine has won.

EXAMPLE 8

There is an elimination process. After a first round of the participation mode the player who has contributed least is eliminated. Then there is a second round and another elimination, and so on until one player (who has not necessarily been the highest contributor in the early rounds) is left and takes the prize.

EXAMPLE 9

As Example 8, but instead of one player taking the whole prize, there is a weighted distribution between the leading players.

EXAMPLE 10

The machines themselves are used again once the total prize has been ascertained. Each player plays his machine once in the normal way but without a stake. With similar slot or fruit machines, for example, the player with the best combination of symbols according to the normal pay schedule would win. If no player has a winning contribution a second or even a third spin might be allowed, or the total prize might be forfeit.

In yet another example, the participation mode simply allows qualified players to be awarded prizes that are displayed on the display 2, without having to press any buttons to select the prize, i.e. the prize awarded is selected automatically by the apparatus in a predetermined manner, e.g. the first qualified wins a set first prize amount, the second wins a lower amount, the third a lower amount still, and so on. Alternatively, the prizes to be awarded to the qualified players may be selected and awarded randomly and substantially simultaneously.

As mentioned above, one function of the clock 8 is to show how much of a qualifying period remains. It is set going once one player qualifies and conveniently will count downwards from five minutes, say, to zero. It may be augmented by flashing lights and/or sounds, particularly at the start of the count down period, to attract players to any unattended machines and to stimulate those who are playing other machines to keep going and attempt to qualify. In another embodiment, participation mode may commence at set times or intervals (e.g. every half hour). The clock 8 can be used to display the time until the next participation mode game begins. When the participation mode start time is reached, qualified players can start playing in participation mode, whilst the remaining players may be allowed to continue playing in self-contained mode to attempt to qualify for the subsequent participation mode game.

In the participation mode, the clock 8 may have another function. The display 2 may be made available only for a limited period so that there is no chance of indefinite accumulation of prizes. To be fair to all qualified players, each should be individually timed and so instead of each player having one go in turn it will be preferred that each player monopolises the display until either he is timed out or is prematurely stopped by ELIMINATE, BANKRUPT or PAY being selected. If a player is so stopped, it could be arranged that the unused remainder of his period is shared between the other qualified players, resulting in those to follow having longer periods and those preceding being allowed a brief return to the display.

For example with four players and with a normal maximum of 20 seconds, if the first player uses that to the full and the second player hits BANKRUPT after

11 seconds, the third and fourth players will be allowed 23 seconds each on the display and the first player can return to it for another three seconds. But if that first player had also hit BANKRUPT at, say 17 seconds the third and fourth players would be able to share $9 + 3$ extra seconds and so their set periods would be 26 seconds each.

But with a limitation on time it is possible to do without the ELIMINATION, BANKRUPT or PAY zones and therefore ensure that the total does not become excessive.

Instead of indicating minutes and seconds in the competition mode, the clock 8 could instead be a counter of permissible button operations for each player. For example, ten button operations may be allowed and the clock will just count down from ten to zero as each player works through his turn.

In Figures 2, 3 and 4 each display has, apart from the monetary prizes, only ELIMINATED, BANKRUPT or PAY. It would be possible to have a mixture on a single display, so that a player has a chance either of being paid or of going bankrupt, for example.

In a further embodiment, a player is able to select from a plurality of participation mode games. This choice can be made at any time during the game, but typically when the player first starts playing, when he qualifies or during the participation mode game. The player may be able to select a different game every time he qualifies, or he may only choose once and then be "committed" to playing that game every time he takes part in the participation mode.

The way in which the participation mode game is selected can depend to some extent on the nature of the participation mode display. Figure 6 shows an example of an illuminated display 60 that can be positioned where it is intended to be seen by players of several machines. The display 60 includes a card game display 62, a roulette display 64 and a slot game display 66. It will be appreciated that other types of games, e.g. dice or video games could also be available in addition or instead of the examples shown. The player can select one of the three games by pressing a corresponding button on his machine. If the player is successful in the participation mode game then he may take another turn, choosing to play the same game or a different one. If one or more other players qualify when the feature is active, a queuing system can be implemented whereby the players take turns to select a participation mode game.

In another embodiment, qualified players may play their selected participation mode games at the same time. The games may be different ones, or the same game (possibly with the players playing for different prize amounts).

In another participation mode game, first, second and third prize amounts are determined, as well as an initial "Chicken Out" amount. Each qualified player can elect to either play the participation mode game or "chicken out" by pressing an appropriate button. If the player decides to "chicken out" then the current "Chicken Out" value is paid out to him and play passes on to the next player who has qualified for participation. However, if the player elects to play the game then a wheel display may be spun. If the wheel stops in an "Eliminated" position then a proportion (e.g. 50%) of the "Chicken Out" value is

paid out and play passes on to the next player. If the wheel stops on a position having an award value then this value may be added to the first prize value, and lesser amounts may be added to the second prize value and/or third prize values and/or the "Chicken Out" value. When only three players remain (the other having either been eliminated or elected to "Chicken Out" at some point), the first, second and third prize amounts become the only ones available. The "Chicken Out" value may increase to the third prize value so that any player can win this if he decides to "chicken out" at this stage. However, if the player decides to play and is eliminated then he wins 50% of the "Chicken Out" value, and the other 50% is distributed to the first and second prize values. The last player left can win the first prize value.

Figure 7 shows another embodiment of a gaming machine. In the example there are four individual gaming machines 702A - 702D linked to a main participation mode display 704. Each individual machine includes a self-contained mode game display area e.g. 705A (which may allow a type of slot machine game to be played) and a participation mode display area, e.g. 706A. Each participation mode display area represents a simulated Bingo card. The numbers and number positions on the simulated card can be generated randomly or recalled from a store and then displayed. Alternatively, the numbers and/or the number positions may be predetermined (and possibly permanently displayed).

When participation mode is activated a number display 708 on the main participation mode display 704 is used to display a number, which is normally selected in a random manner to simulate a traditional Bingo game. This process

is repeated until the participation mode ends (e.g. when there is a winner; after a predetermined period of time or after a certain number of numbers have been "called"). As in a traditional Bingo game, if a "called" number is present on a player's Bingo card then that number is crossed off (or highlighted in another way on the display 706) and when certain combinations of numbers on a player's card (e.g. a full house) have been crossed out then a prize can be awarded. Thus, the participation mode game of all the qualified players can be affected substantially simultaneously during the participation mode.

The main participation mode display 704 also includes a game number display 710, which shows a number corresponding to the participation mode currently being played (e.g. a counter representing the number of participation mode games played that day). Each machine 702A - 702D also includes a qualification game number display, e.g. 712D which shows a number indicating the participation mode game number for which the player of the machine is attempting to qualify when playing the machine in its self-contained mode to help avoid confusion.

It will be apparent to those skilled in the art that the technical implementation of the apparatus can be achieved in various ways. Often, the participation mode display will be controlled at least mainly by the common control unit 3, with data stored or generated by the unit 3 determining the prizes awarded during the participation mode. However, it is also possible that the individual machines store or generate data that determines the participation mode prize that will be awarded to the player of the respective machine, with this data being transferred to the unit 3 and/or directly to the participation mode

display 2. Thus, the participation mode prize can be actually limited by the individual machine, but this arrangement can give the player the impression that the prize is determined by a component external to his own machine.

CLAIMS

1. Gaming apparatus comprising:

5 a plurality of individually playable gaming machines, the machines being playable in self-contained and participation modes, the self-contained mode being with each machine being played independently for its own prizes, and the participation mode allowing players of said machines selected for participation (qualified players) to be awarded a prize distinct from any prize available from any said machine in self-contained mode;

a common control unit;

10 a link allowing communication between said machines and said unit, and

a participation mode display for displaying play of the apparatus during participation mode.

2. Gaming apparatus as claimed in Claim 1, wherein the participation mode allows said qualified players to participate together in the selection of prizes from the display.

3. Apparatus as claimed in Claim 1, wherein participation is initiated on a random or time-related basis.

4. Apparatus as claimed in Claim 1, wherein participation is initiated by any one machine delivering a particular qualifying win.

20 5. Apparatus as claimed in Claim 1, wherein participation is only permitted to those machines that have been played within a pre-determined period prior to the particular qualifying win of said one machine.

6. Apparatus as claimed in Claim 4, wherein participation is only permitted to those machines whose last play has been with a maximum stake or with a side wager.

7. Apparatus as claimed in Claim 4, wherein for participation players of other machines have to achieve a qualifying win on their machines within a given period following the particular qualifying win on said one machine.

8. Apparatus as claimed in Claim 7, wherein any player achieving a further qualifying win on his machine within said given period receives a bonus.

9. Apparatus as claimed in Claim 8, wherein the bonus is the banking of a further qualification to be used subsequent to the competition.

10. Apparatus as claimed in Claim 8, wherein the bonus is the increase of any prize won during the competition.

11. Apparatus as claimed in Claim 9, wherein the bonus is a facility to cancel an adverse selection from the display.

12. Apparatus as claimed in Claim 1, wherein the prizes are indicated on a static display and are sequentially highlighted in the participation mode, the final prize highlighted being awarded, and wherein participation controls on their machines enable qualified players to attempt to arrest the highlighting at a desired prize.

13. Apparatus as claimed in Claim 1, wherein the prizes are shown on a wheel of fortune which is rotated in the participation mode, the prize indicated when the wheel stops being awarded and wherein participation controls on their machines enable qualified players to attempt to arrest the wheel with a desired prize indicated.

14. Apparatus as claimed in Claim 1, wherein the prizes are shown on reels which are rotated in the participation mode, the prizes indicated on a win line when the reels stop being awarded and wherein participation controls on their machines enable qualified players to attempt to stop the reels with desired prizes indicated.

15. Apparatus as claimed in Claim 1, wherein a non-qualified player playing the self-contained mode game can qualify for and participate in a participation mode game that is currently being played by qualified players.

16. Apparatus as claimed in Claim 1, wherein a non-qualified player playing the self-contained mode game can qualify for and participate in a subsequent participation mode game that commences after a participation mode game being played by qualified players has been completed.

17. Apparatus as claimed in Claim 16, wherein the weighting is according to the order in which qualified players have contributed most to the total prize.

18. Apparatus as claimed in Claim 1, wherein the prize distribution to the qualified players is weighted.

19. Apparatus as claimed in Claim 1, wherein the prize distribution is determined by having the participation in stages, the lowest contributor in the first stage being eliminated and so on until the highest contributor at the final stage wins.

20. Apparatus as claimed in Claim 19, with the modification that the total prize has weighted distribution according to the reverse order of elimination, the player not being eliminated receiving the greatest share.

21. Apparatus as claimed in Claim 1, wherein the prize distribution is determined by qualified players again playing their respective machines, the prizes being determined by the relative results on the machines.

22. Apparatus as claimed in Claim 1, wherein a qualified player is limited by time or number of participation control operations in his opportunity to influence the display.

23. Apparatus as claimed in Claim 1, wherein the display includes prize signs and at least one deciding win sign, prizes accumulating while prize signs are selected, but each selection of a deciding win sign terminating the associated machine's participation, the player of that machine winning the prize(s) he has accumulated from the display.

24. Apparatus as claimed in Claim 1, wherein the display includes prize signs and at least one deciding win sign, participation entailing cyclic operation of participation controls on their machines by the qualified players which cause prizes to accumulate while prize signs are selected, until one participation control causes the deciding win sign to be selected, whereupon the player of the associated machine wins the accumulated prizes.

25. Apparatus as claimed in Claim 1, wherein the display includes prize signs and at least one disqualification sign, participation entailing cyclic operation of participation controls on their machines by the qualified players which causes prizes to accumulate while prize signs are selected, but which results in the elimination of any player whose participation control selects a disqualification sign, this continuing until a final disqualification leaves one player still qualified who wins the total prizes accumulated.

26. Apparatus as claimed in Claim 1, wherein the display is adapted to be duplicated for each qualified player beyond the first one so that the players can operate participation controls on their machines simultaneously and/or observe the participation mode game on their machines.

5 27. Apparatus as claimed in Claim 1, wherein qualified players are awarded prizes automatically in the participation mode without any influence over actual selection of prizes.

28. Apparatus as claimed in Claim 1, wherein the participation mode display includes one or more display distinct from displays associated with the individual
10 machines.

29. Apparatus as claimed in Claim 1, wherein the participation mode display includes at least part of a display associated with one or more said machine.

30. Apparatus as claimed in Claim 1, wherein the machines include personal computers connected to a communications network.

15 31. Apparatus as claimed in Claim 1, wherein the common control unit includes a personal computer connected to a communications network.

32. Apparatus as claimed in Claim 1, wherein data relating to the prizes available in the participation mode for a player of each said individual machine is stored on the respective individual machine.

Application No: GB 0308641.0
Claims searched: 1-32

Examiner: Stuart Purdy
Date of search: 18 August 2003

Patents Act 1977 : Search Report under Section 17

Documents considered to be relevant:

| Category | Relevant to claims | Identity of document and passage or figure of particular relevance | |
|----------|--|--|---|
| XY | X: 1, 4, 18-22, 27-29 & 32 Y: 12-14 | US 5393057 A | (MARNELL) See column 3 lines 34-46, column 4 lines 63-66, column 5 lines 61-68, column 9 lines 51-64, and column 10 lines 7-23 and lines 29-37; |
| XY | X: 1, 4, 5, 18-22, 28 & 29 Y: 12-14 | US 20020187836 A1 | (MEYER) See page 2 paragraphs 19, 22, 27 and 28, and page 3 paragraphs 30, 33 and 34; |
| XY | X: 1, 3, 4, 15, 18, 21, 22, 27, 29, & 32 | US 20020042296 A1 | (WALKER) see page 4 paragraphs 52, 55, and 59, page 5 paragraph 64 and 69, page 6 paragraph 79 and page 7 paragraphs 90 & 91; |
| XY | X: 1, 3, 15, 18, 19, 21, 27, & 29-32 Y: 12-14 | US 5816918 A | (KELLY) See column 15 lines 5-25, column 21 lines 43-49, column 22 lines 42-46, column 28 lines 56-59, column 30 lines 44-49, and column 31 lines 12-29, and 57-62; |
| XY | X: 1, 6 & 15 Y: 12-14 | WO 99/10849 A1 | (McNEE) see page 3 lines 19-32, page 4 lines 11-14, and page 7 lines 5-7; |
| Y | 12 - 14 | GB 2258334 A | (KEANE) see page 7 lines 9-29, and page 9 lines 1-4 and 16-28; |
| A | 1 at least | US 6068553 A | (PARKER) see whole document; |

Categories:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|--|
| X | Document indicating lack of novelty or inventive step | A | Document indicating technological background and/or state of the art. |
| Y | Document indicating lack of inventive step if combined with one or more other documents of same category. | P | Document published on or after the declared priority date but before the filing date of this invention. |
| & | Member of the same patent family | E | Patent document published on or after, but with priority date earlier than, the filing date of this application. |

Field of Search:

Search of GB, EP, WO & US patent documents classified in the following areas of the UKC^V:

G4V

Worldwide search of patent documents classified in the following areas of the IPC⁷:

Application No: GB 0308641.0
Claims searched: 1-32

Examiner: Stuart Purdy
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The following online and other databases have been used in the preparation of this search report:

WPI, EPDOC & JAPIO